
INNOVATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

HUMAN eSERVICES DELIVERY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the mid-1990's, the Internet has been the rising star in the field of commerce and business transaction. An eCommerce model has evolved that allows consumers to obtain products and services without having to leave their home. Government has lagged behind the private sector in adopting Internet technology. And while some government agencies have implemented eCommerce at various levels, the delivery of human services through the Internet has not yet been achieved. The technology exists to implement an Internet-based human services delivery system. It is the purpose of this case study to create a vision of what such a system might look like and how it can be implemented.

Human eServices Delivery is the use of Internet Technology to deliver services to individuals and families in their homes. Services delivered in this manner provide a level of privacy, dignity and speed that is not currently available. Examples of such services include:

- Determination of eligibility and the issuance of benefits
- Search for affordable child care and the online enrollment of children into care
- Locate housing and completion of an online rental agreement
- Search for a job, submit an online application, take an employment examination
- Enroll in online classes that can result in a high school diploma or college degree
- Report incidents of child and elder abuse online

The benefits Human eServices Delivery provides include:

- Easier access to services, and faster services delivery
- Elimination of the 'digital divide' phenomena
- Preservation of personal dignity, privacy and self respect
- Reduction in the potential to commit fraud
- Cost savings through reduced office space requirements and redirection of support staff

The implementation of the Human eServices Delivery model requires the acceptance of some basic principles. These include the need for process re-engineering and the recognition that past experience cannot be the guide to the future in this type of project. Implementation will require the development of a strategic plan, a dedicated project team, broad support for the project, collaboration with the private sector, and possibly the formation of a consortium of counties that can pool their resources.

A vision of what a Human eServices Delivery web site might look like can be found at:

<http://members.tripod.com/jkzimm>

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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990's, the Internet has been the rising star in the field of commerce and business transaction. The growth of eCommerce (Electronic Commerce) has been significant. Government, with its traditional lag behind the private sector in adopting innovative technology, is just now beginning to incorporate the Internet into its operations.

The original purpose of this BASSC case study was to conduct a survey of what was being accomplished in human services relative to the use of Internet technology. Using the Santa Clara County Human Services Agency as a base of operations, an extensive review of web sites nationwide was conducted. The results were disappointing. While some human service agencies had a web presence, few had implemented an eCommerce interface with which to conduct business. Most sites operated like billboards or televisions—they provided information, but there was no way to interact with them.

The results of the survey forced a change in the focus and purpose of this study. From a simple survey of what others were doing, it has evolved into a call to action. It creates an image and vision of how human services should be delivered in the future, and urges counties to begin working on this vision. Santa Clara's excellent Information Systems personnel expressed many of the ideas contained herein.

HUMAN eSERVICES DELIVERY: A DEFINITION

Human eServices Delivery is the delivery of human services through the use of Internet technology.

This technology enables the individual or family in need to receive help directly in the home. They do not need to leave the home and travel to an office to get assistance. It involves the use of personal computers, PDA's (Personal Digital Assistants) and other devices connected to web sites administered by human service agencies.

Human eServices Delivery empowers people. It enables them to get help without having to endure a process that can sometimes prove demeaning and embarrassing. This concept makes the delivery of human services as efficient and respectful as the delivery of any other product or service available in our society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET

The history of civilization may be characterized by the continuous compression of time and distance. We can see this trend by looking at how people have gone shopping to the 'grocery store' over the past millennia:

In 3000 BC, a trip to the 'grocery store' meant walking 20 or 30 miles in search of game—such a journey could take days. Later, in 1600 AD, a trip to the store meant harnessing the horse to the cart and going into town—a journey of 5–10 miles that could take all day, but at least the mode of transportation had gotten faster, and the 'grocery store' had gotten closer. By 1950, the grocery store had 'moved' to within 1–2 miles of the individual, and the journey could be made by automobile, further reducing the time required to complete the shopping trip.

The above example demonstrates the historic pattern of the use of technology to reduce the time it takes travel a distance to obtain a product or service. It also shows that the physical distance between the consumer and the product or service has decreased.

Today, a revolution is occurring that has accelerated this pattern. The revolution is the Internet, and the change is in how a product or service is obtained. Through the Internet, the product or service comes to the consumer—the consumer no longer has to embark on a journey to get it.

Consider the power the Internet has conveyed to the average person. From the comfort of the home, an individual can:

- Purchase food and have it delivered to the front door in just a few hours;
- Order an automobile and have it arrive in the driveway;
- Get a real estate loan and purchase a home;
- Purchase books, life insurance, CD's, prescription drugs, and a host of other products and services without having to leave the house;
- Conduct business with government by paying taxes, parking tickets, utility bills, and voting.

Unfortunately, the one service that cannot be obtained through the Internet is Human Services. In spite of rapid advances in technology, human services continue to be delivered the old fashioned way—the applicant or recipient must go to an office to get help. While the rest of the world moves rapidly to provide goods and services to individuals in their home, the delivery of human services lags far behind. Indeed, the manner in which these services are delivered creates a 'second class consumer' within the context of today's economy. The

second class consumer is forced to receive products and services in a manner very different from mainstream society.

THE POSSIBILITIES

The range of possibilities that eServices provides is limited only by the imagination. Individuals or families, from within the privacy and comfort of their home, can log into an eServices Delivery web site and do the following:

- Apply for Food Stamps, Cash and Medi-Cal benefits online. Information provided through an electronic application is automatically verified by interconnected automated systems. Eligibility is determined, and an online notification is sent to the applicant, often within a matter of just a few minutes. If eligible, benefits are electronically deposited into the applicant's bank account. If an account does not exist, one is created;
- Search for affordable child care and enroll children online. Local child care providers are connected to a central database and continuously update information about their rates, vacancies, etc.;
- Find housing and submit an online rental agreement. A database of available housing is maintained;
- Search for a job, submit an online employment application, take an employment examination;
- Enroll in online classes that can provide a high school equivalency diploma or a college degree;
- Locate a variety of community resources and generate an electronic referral;
- Communicate with caseworkers and others who are in similar circumstances through the use of email, chat rooms and bulletin boards.

This is only a partial list of what is possible. Online reporting of child and elder abuse, recruitment and licensing of foster parents, locating an In Home Supportive Service Provider are just some of the additional services that can be deployed.

THE BENEFITS

Human eServices Delivery confers many benefits to both the people in need of services, and the organizations that administer them. Some of these benefits include:

- Easier access to services. The ability to receive a wide range of human services in the home is very powerful and goes far beyond what is possible with today's delivery systems;
- Services can be delivered more rapidly because of the speed of electronic transactions;
- eServices will help bridge the 'digital divide', that gap between those who have computers and those that do not. Implicit in the concept of eServices Delivery is that families and individuals will either be furnished with computers, or will be given easy access to them;
- The delivery of human services over the Internet eliminates the 'second class consumer' syndrome referenced earlier. This occurs because human services is delivered in the same manner as other products and services in the economy;
- Personal dignity, privacy, and self respect is preserved because people do not have to go out in public to ask for help—they can do so from within the privacy of their home;
- To the extent that persons do not have to go to offices to fill out paperwork and see human services staff, some cost savings may accrue through reduced office space requirements. Similarly, support staff can be redirected to perform other tasks;

- The opportunity for fraud can be reduced if human services automated systems can interface with other systems that can verify property, identity, and other factors pertinent to a determination of eligibility;
- Changes in existing programs, and the implementation of new programs, can occur much faster if services are provided online.

THE VISION

To help create the vision of the future of human services delivery, a prototype web site was created. Although not functional, the site does simulate the look and feel of what Human eServices Delivery might look like. The name of the site is SOL (Services On Line). SOL's logo is:



The site may be visited by pointing your browser to:

<http://members.tripod.com/jkzimm>

THE IMPLEMENTATION

The most exciting feature of this proposal is that the technology already exists to make this happen. New technology does not have to be created. At the same time, because this model parallels the eCommerce model the private sector has adopted, improvements and changes in technology will only serve to enhance and improve on this concept.

The primary challenges facing the implementation of Human eServices Delivery will be those associat-

ed with the normal resistance to change that is inherent in any organization.

There are some basic principles that must be understood prior to embarking on implementation of this concept:

- Accept the need for process re-engineering. You cannot place your existing off-line processes online—changes will need to be made. For example, a program that requires a face-to-face interview as a condition of eligibility will require changes to achieve the same result as an interview.
- Experience can be your worst enemy. In situations where rapid change is occurring, past experience can often be a barrier to implementing new ideas.
- There may be political resistance to implementation because this concept makes obsolete systems currently under development that have very high development costs

The actual implementation of a Human eServices Delivery System should include (but not be limited to) the following steps:

- Create a strategic plan that will guide and direct the implementation effort. Be prepared to modify and change the plan frequently as experience is gained;
- Create a project team comprised of program and technical staff. Members of the team should be selected for their creative and innovative qualities, and should share a passionate belief in the ultimate success of what they are doing. The team must be dedicated to the project. If they must also perform other functions, inevitable crisis will divert their time and attention away from the project;

- Start small by implementing functions that are limited in scope and have a high probability of success. Nothing ensures the successful completion of a project like the successful completion of incremental phases;
- Consider the formation of a consortium of human services agencies that can pool resources and jointly implement a common delivery system;
- Collaborate with the private sector on strategies for providing personal computers and PDA's to persons who will access eServices;
- Ensure that there is a broad base of support for the project. The early involvement of community organizations, other government agencies, client advocacy groups, and labor unions is essential.

CONCLUSIONS

We have it in our power to shape the future. We can do this if we create a clear vision of the future we want, and visualize that future daily. To the extent that this BASSC case study has helped the reader formulate a vision of the future of human services delivery, it has achieved its purpose.

Counties that possess a solid technical infrastructure, innovative and creative management, and the dedicated resources necessary to undertake a project of this nature, have an excellent chance of success.